(c) what are the projections for the period January-June 2000 ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN) :

(a) As per the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics provisional data the trade deficit during April-December, 1999 has been to the tune of US $ 7038.68 million which is lower than the trade deficit of US $ 7328.42 milloion during the corresponding period last year.

(b) and (c) Trade deficit is the excess of imports over exports. Imports are trade by the trade industry as per the demand of the economy and some essential imports like POL, the prices of which are governed by international factors. Acceleration in export growth also leads to lower trade deficit. A number of steps have been taken to further enhance the export growth which include reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation, simplification of Procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions.

Technological Capabilities of Indian Industries

2485. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) the initiatives taken till date to strengthen the technological capabilities of Indian industries both for meeting the national needs and for providing global competitiveness;

(b) the State-wise bodies so far established/set up particularly in Rajasthan and Orissa to facilitate development of new technologies;

(c) what type of support Government are providing to Industries and Institutions carrying Research and development and funds allocated therefor; and

(d) what achievements have been made in our country during the last two years in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN) : (a) The strengthening of the technological capabilities of Indian industry depends on the existence of indigenous technological capabilities and acquisition of selected technology from abroad that complements national research and development efforts and the growth of locally created technology.

The commercial transfer of technology to strength the technological base of Indian industries has taken place through enterprise to enterprise arrangement, which includes technology licensing execution of services and assistances, or as a result of direct foreign investment including joint ventures.

(b) and (c) Department of Science & Technology supports Science and Engineering Research and development related activities and provides Grants-in-Aid to Academic Institutions and National Laboratories in various ways including, inter alia, the following :

(i) Swaran Jayanti Fellowship.

(ii) Better Opportunities for Young Scientists for Career Advancement in Science & Technology.

(iii) Regional Sophisticated Instrumentation Centres.

(iv) Kishore Vagyanik Protsahan Yojana.

(v) Intensification of research in High Priority Areas scheme.

(vi) Fund for Infrastructure in Science & Technology.

(vii) Financial support to Scientific and Engineering R&D related projects.

These Scientific and Engineering research and development and promotional activities undertaken at institutions all over including the States of Rajasthan and Orissa. the Department of Science & Technology has, however not set up any institution for development of new technologies during the last three years.

Government has introduced several fiscal incentives and other support measures from time to time to boost R&D activities in the country. These include

(i) Income Tax Relief on R&D expenditure.

(ii) Weight Tax Deduction for sponsored research.

(iii) Customs Duty Exemption.

(iv) Five Year Tax Holiday for commercial R&D companies.

(v) Customs Duty waiver for three years on goods produced based on indigenously developed technologies and duly patented in any one of the countries in European Union and USA or Japan or in both.

(vi) Accelerated depriciation allowance on new plant and machinery set up based on indigeneous technology.

(vii) Price control exemption on domestic R&D based bulk drugs.

(viii) Increasing the number of national awards for outstanding R&D achievements nd commercialisation of public funded R&D.

(ix) Setting of Technology Development Board in September, 1996.

As per the latest official statistics available the R&D expenditure by the major scientific agencies and other Ministries/Departments of the Central Government has risen from Rs. 4710.51 crores in 1994-95 to Rs. 5817.76 crores in 1996-97.

(d) The country has made considerable achievements during the recent years in the field of science & technology. These achievements relate to various discipline of science & technology like Atomic Energy, Space, Biotechnology, Ocean Science, Industrial Research, Biomedical Research Agriculture, Computer Science, etc.

Development of Ceramic Industry in Rajasthan

2486. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that there is considerable scope for development of ceramic industry in Rajasthan;

(b) whether it is also a fact that ceramic industry can be developed in the State on a viable basis, if the availablity of Natural Gas assured; and

(c) if so, what steps Government propose to take in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN) : (a) Although the State of Rajasthan has good deposits of important raw materails, yet the prospects of developing ceramic industry in Rajasthan has not been encouraging due to low per capita consumption of ceramic products and low market demand due to available of natural stones. Presently, there is only one ceramic tile unit and one sanitaryware unit in organised sector in Rajasthan and bulk of their production is sold outside the State.

(b) and (c) Economic viability of ceramic products industry depends upon various factors such as infrastructural facilities, raw materail cost, market demand etc. As far as the natural gas availability in Rajasthan is concerned, the present and projected gas availablity from the domestic sources has been fully allocated. As a result, it will not be possible for the present to consider allocation of gas for ceramic industry in Rajasthan.